

Ancient coins don't always fetch top dollar

By Roger Boye

Here are answers to more questions about coins and currency.

Q—I've noted in advertisements that some ancient coins cost less than \$10 each. How can anyone afford to sell something so old for so little? Could the coins be counterfeit?

B.G., Aurora

A—Despite their age, many ancients retail for modest sums. That's because the supply of certain varieties exceeds the demand.

You should do business with experienced, well-established dealers who can spot the fakes. But don't worry too much. Con artists who forge coins usually work on the higher-priced specimens; there's not much profit in copying cheap ancients.

Q—What addresses should we use to order official coin sets from Canada and Great Britain?

Y.P., Chicago

A—Write to the Royal Canadian Mint, P.O. Box 478, Station A, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 9L9 Canada, and to the British Royal Mint, c/o Barclays Bank of New York, N.A., P.O. Box 2570, New York, N.Y. 10163.

The seven-coin Canadian proof set, which includes a 1986 silver dollar commemorating the centennials of Vancouver, British Columbia, and of coast-to-coast rail travel in Canada, costs \$34 in U.S. funds. The British proof set for 1986, comprised of eight coins in a leather case, goes for \$39.75. New to the British set this year is a base metal, two-pound coin marking the Commonwealth Games to be held next June in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Q—I own a 1969 dime that has a normal back side. However, the front is copper color and the dime is much thinner than usual. Is this coin rare?

C.R., Villa Park

A—Most likely, one of the two outside clad layers on your dime broke away during the production process, exposing the copper core. Experts say such coins might retail for \$20 or so.

But beware of fakes; hobbyists will pay a premium only for authentic mint errors.

Q—Is U.S. paper money from the 1870s still legal tender? Or has Congress made it illegal to use dollar bills more than 100 years old?

B.G., Aurora

A—All currency issued by Uncle Sam under the Constitution remains lawful money. However, you wouldn't want to spend the antiques because their value as collectibles probably exceeds the face amounts.